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A Biographical Sketch of Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi (1875–1914)—An Unexplored Telugu-Sanskrit Scholar and Yogi

C.S.H.N. Murthy

Introduction

Internationalizing regional Sanskrit scholars in the modern digital era has become a colossal task. Several constraints dogged the project: firstly, Sanskrit scholars who lived before and during 19th century had no privilege to publish their works; secondly, there were no reputed publishers like today's Sage, Routledge, etc; thirdly, others who attempted to publish the works of those scholars with the help of local printers/publishers did not recognize that the present-day standard bibliographic formats of reputed publishers and journals do not allow a citation of such printers/publishers; fourthly, even such printed works did not follow standard formats of book publishing (such as Foreword, Introduction, Chapterization, Conclusion, Bibliography, References, Glossary, etc.) that could be helpful for scholars to cite them in their research; and finally, there have been neither efforts to analyze or interpret the works of these scholars either in Telugu or English. Nor were there biographical sketches of them in English, the *lingua franca* that connects the local with the global.

Most of the works of Sanskrit scholars ended up as mere translations into regional languages such as Telugu. Thus, the works of Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi, Vavilikolanu Subba Rao, Tirupati Venkata Kavulu, Copparapu Kavulu, Ramakrishna Kavulu, Tadepalli Raghavanarayana Sastri, etc have never had exposure to national and international readers. In fact,

there are three types of Sanskrit scholars. Some are born Sanskrit poets and scholars. Some became Sanskrit scholars after a systematic learning of Sanskrit. But, Sanskrit scholars like Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi, Tadepalli Raghavanarayana Sastri, Vavilikolanu Subbarao, etc are yogis and Sanskrit poets and pundits whose scholarship, both in Sanskrit and philosophy, floats at a far higher plane. These scholars have delved deep into the philosophical realms which simultaneously enriched Sanskrit literature.

Despite all these constraints, some works of Telugu-Sanskrit scholars have figured in some English papers in those days (Murthy, 1961). Unfortunately those publications have vanished in the course of time as they were not digitized or preserved on micro-film. However, only a few modern scholars had taken up the works of these ancient Telugu-Sanskrit scholars (Datta, 1977; Rao, 2017) but such research did neither offer complete biographical sketches of these authors, nor the entire gamut of their works. That said, the present article as part of a project 'internationalizing Telugu-Sanskrit Scholars' intends to bring to the fore Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi's (1875–1914), biography and his contributions to *Advaita* philosophy that were so intertwined that one cannot isolate one from the other.

It is also high time that we quote here the words of Patibanda Sundara Rao, a well-known Shavian scholar and founder of the only George Bernard Shaw Society in India, about Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi, whom he treated as his guru and whose works he had carefully collected and preserved till date. Talking to *Indian Express* (January 1, 1983), he said that he is "prepared to hand them over to any university or institution for that is the only way to preserve them for posterity." He also said, "Values are changing and Sanskrit has lost its importance. These great works of that literary genius might never be read by anybody." According to Sundara Rao, "Shaw and Bellamkonda Rama Rao are not meant for everybody and they are, in Shaw's own words, "brains beyond the ordinary." K.S.R. Datta (1977) who has done the first-ever doctoral work on Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi from Sri Venkateswara University has also echoed similar views: "Ramaraya Kavi's contributions to Advaita in particular and Sanskrit in general, are immeasurable but this is not duly recognized by the scholars." He hoped that the world of Sanskritists will soon realize the contribution of Ramaraya Kavi to Sanskrit in different fields.

Biographical Sketch

Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi (1875–1914) is a Sanskrit poet, a scholar and a Yogi (Datta, 1980). During the short time he lived, he had written nearly 148

classic works in Sanskrit {Balasubramanian, 2008 (1901); Ramulu, 1998}. For various reasons, most of his classics vanished in the course of time (Ramulu, 1998).Today only 45 are available. While some are available in part, the remaining are available full length. Known as a staunch supporter of *Advaita siddhanta* (theory) of Adi Śnkara, Ramaraya Kavi's philosophical interpretations and dialectics of logical disputation of the *Advaita* system of thought earned him the name *Apara Adi Śankara* which means that Ramaraya Kavi is another incarnation of *Adi Śankara*.(Balasubramanian, 2008). He was also a Yogi from a very young age following his initiation into spirituality by none other than Lord Hayagreeva (the horse-faced Hindu God supposed to be the fountainhead of all Knowledge).

Early Life and Education

Ramaraya Kavi's earlier name was Rama Rao. He was born to Bellamkonda Mohan Rao and Hanumamba on December 27, 1875 in Pamidipadu *Agraharam*, Narasaraopet, Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. Though there were 6000 Niyogi Brahmins, they paradoxically embraced the *Vaiṣnava* cult headed by Sri Ramanuja Acharya of Sriperumbudur. Ramanuja founded a new *bhakti* tradition called *Viśiṣtādvaita*. As such, Rama Rao's family was also devoted to Lord Vishnu pursuing the cult of *Viśiṣtādvaita*. (Balasubramanian, 2008; Sundararama Sastri, 1952).

Rama Rao lost his father when he was seven years old. After initial home schooling at Pamidipadu, he was sent to Guntur for higher studies in an English-medium school. However, Rama Rao could not continue his studies in Guntur due to repeated health problems. He came back to Pamidipadu *Agraharam* where he continued his studies in Sanskrit under Sankaramanchi Lakshminarayana Sastri and Sankaramanchi Seetaramaiah. He learned the Upanishads, *Śreerudram—Namakam* and *Chamakam*, the *Vedas*, etc under their supervision. (Ramulu, 1998). Later he continued his studies in *Mahābhāṣyam*, *Vyākaranam* (Grammar), and *Tarkam* (logic) under the guidance of Purighatla Rama Sastri, Bhagavatula Hari Sastri and Purighatla Subrahmanya Sastri. He learned *Manorama*, *Śabdendu Śekharamu*, *Patanjali Bhāṣyam*, etc under Purighatla Rama Sastri.

Initially Rama Rao learned the works up to *Siddhānta Kaumudi* and then to *Sandhi Panchakam* under Purighatla Rama Sastri. (Balasubramanian, 2008). It was a simple and primary level of learning. At the same time, he learned *Tarkam* (logical disputation) under Purighatla Subrahamanya Sastri. After a few months of initial teaching, both the teachers had to go to their

hometowns to attend to their personal chores. Consequently, they left behind the books which they brought to teach Rama Rao. By the time they returned, Rama Rao had not only read all those books but also produced a highly simplified commentary on *Siddhānta Kaumudi* entitled as *Saradratri*. He also wrote a commentary on *Kuvalayanandamu*. Both the teachers upon their return found the Rama Rao's commentaries as scholarly (*Vijnāna Sārvaswamu*, 1959).

In fact there were eminent scholars in Sanskrit among the ancestors of Rama Rao. (Balasubramanian, 2008). Among his ancestors, Bhaskara Deekshitulu and Alwaraiah were also Sanskrit scholars. In fact Rama Rao dearly held his forefather Alwaraiah's drama—*Sankalpa Sūryōdayam*—close to his heart till his last breath (Panduranga Sarma, 2010).

Family History

In fact, the ancestors of Rama Raya Kavi were known as Deshpandeys, who hailed from the kingdom of Magadha in North India. They migrated to a mini kingdom called Pahandipadu (also known as *Swayambhooja Varam*) *Agraharam* (Krishna Sastri, 1813) situated in the Telugu hinterland near Amaravati which was the capital of the then king Venkatadri Naidu (1783–1816). He successfully eliminated *pindaris* and *chenchus*, the notorious robbers, who were attacking and killing and robbing innocent people residing in the villages around Amaravati. Rama Rao's forefathers, chiefly Chennappa and his son Bhaskara Deekshitulu, residing in Pahandipadu *Agraharam* were also among those attacked by the Chenchus (Sundararama Sastri, 1952).

In fact, Bhaskara Deekshitulu was known for his all multifaceted personality, with deep scholarship in Sanskrit and also deftness in fighting the enemies. (Panduranga Sarma, 2010). He had received Gunta Garlapadu *Agraharam* as a gift for his adeptness in wars and defeating enemies (Krishna Sastri, 1813). He thus became a landlord of over one thousand acres of land. (Panduranga Sarma, 2010). Deekshitulu had three sons: Pedda Vallappa, Papaiah and Ramakrishnaiah. These three sons were not only eminent scholars in Sanskrit, according to Professor Kancherla Panduranga Sarma (2010), but also warriors like their father. Bhaskara Deekshitulu maintained a good rapport with the then king of Amaravati Vasireddy Jaggaiah Naidu. After the demise of Jaggaiah Naidu, Venkatadri Naidu became the king of Amaravati. He appointed Bhaskara Deekshitulu as one of the poet laureates in his court. During the attacks of *pindaris* and *chenchus* in this area,

Deekshitulu was also sent to fight the war with these criminals and he lost two of his sons, Pedda Vallappa and Papaiah in the war.

With his only remaining son Ramakrishnaiah, Deekshitulu escaped from the war-front and secretly moved his entire family and the Magadha villagers who were all staying with him at Pahandipadu, to the Bellamkonda zamindar's fort (Balasubramanian, 2008). They remained there till Venkatadri Naidu completely eliminated all the enemies in another war. It was after this that Deekshitulu, along with all his family members and villagers, returned to their homeland, Pahandipadu. It is this Pahandipadu *Agraharam* that assumed various names later: Paidipadu, Pamidipadu etc.(Krishna Sastri, 1813). The last name came to stay officially in the geographical history of Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. As they returned from Bellamkonda Fort, they were addressed as 'Bellamkonda' family by all others. Thus, the Magadhian Despandeys got their surname changed to 'Bellamkonda.' Thereafter, Rama Rao's family was also known with the surname 'Bellamkonda' (Balasubramanian, 2008).

Devotion to Lord Hayagreeva

In keeping with his family tradition of *Vaiṣṇavism*, Ramaraya was also worshipping Lord Vishnu from his childhood. He used to get up early in the morning and take bath at *Seshu* Well, which was very close to the burial grounds in Pamidipadu. After taking bath, he used to go into a nearby tamarind tree grove and perform *sandhyāvandanam*[1].

Later he used to perform penance (*Tapas*) praying to Lord Vishnu for more than two hours in *Tulasi Vanam* (Ocimum tenuiflorum grove), cultivated in the temple premises of Lord Rama Vallabharaya Temple (a Lord Vishnu temple), constructed by Ganti Raju during the Cholas' rule in the South way back in 1155 AD (Datta, 1980). As Lord Vishnu is traditionally worshipped using garlands made up of *Tulasi* leaves, Rama Rao maintained the *Tulasi Vanam* to offer *Tulasi* garlands to Lord Vishnu every day. Till he attained the age of 14 years, this was the spiritual routine of Rama Rao during his childhood in Pamidipadu. While doing all these devotional chores, he had continued his education under Purighatla Rama Sastri, Subrahmanya Sastri and Bhagavatula Hari Sastri as detailed in the foregoing section (Balasubramanian, 2008; Panduranga Sarma, 2010).

1. A typical brahminical ritual that must be followed by every Brahmin three times a day as a rule after initiation into *Brahmacharya* by thread ceremony.

One night, after Ramaraya fell asleep, Lord Hayagreeva appeared in his dream and offered him the holy *mantra* that initiated him into the spiritual realm at once. Further, Lord Hayagreeva told him that the regular recitation of this holy mantra offered him infinite knowledge independent of his learning through books or teachers. Lord Hayagreeva also directed him to collect the corresponding *yantra* of the *mantra*, from the house of Ratnamacharya at Dammalapadu village very close to Pamidipadu. Next day morning Rama Rao went to Dammalapadu and approached Ratnamacharya explaining his dream in which Lord Hayagreeva appeared and directed Rama Rao towards him. Pleased by the narration of Rama Rao's spiritual experience, Ratnamacharya happily handed over to him the book containing the *yantra* of the holy *mantra* which Hayagreeva had offered to Ramaraya in the dream. It was thus that Rama Rao acquired both the *mantra* and the *yantra* of Lord Hayagreeva which he continued to worship and meditate upon till he breathed his last.

During the days of his worship of Lord Vishnu at the temple of Lord Rama Vallabharaya, he composed several poetic works: *Sri Rama Vallabharaya Stuti Śatakam*, *Rukmini Pariṇaya Champu*, *Kandarpa Darpa Vilāsam*, and others. (Panduranga Sarma, 2010). As a consequence of his initiation into the spiritual realm, Rama Rao changed his name from 'Rao' to 'Raya'. In praise of the Lord Hayagreeva who initiated him into spirituality and scholarly literary works, he wrote *Srimad Hayavadana Śatakam*, *Hayagreeva Aṣtottara Śatanāmāvali*, *Sri Hayagreeva Sahasraṇāmāvali*, and *Hayagreeva Navaratnastuti*. (Sundararama Sastri, 1952).

Evidence of Yogic Manifestations

Lanka Sundararama Sastri (1952), who was the first disciple to document his biography, has written that right at the age of 14, Rama Rao turned into a Yogi due to Lord Hayagreeva's initiation in his dream. Under the yogic influence in him, Ramaraya started writing extraordinary commentaries on *Brahmasūtras*, *Upaniṣads* and the *Gīta* that bore ample testimony to his *Bhrahmajnāna* (Omniscience) (Sundararama Sastri, 1952).

It resulted in his masterly works such as *Siddhānta Sinduhu*, *Vēdānta Sangrahaha*, *Śankaraśankara Bhāṣya Vimarśaha*, *Vēdānta Muktāvali* and others, which have dismissed the tenets of Ramanuja's *Sri Bhāṣya*, the basis of *Viśiṣtādvaita*, as most illogical and perverted (Balasubramanian, 2008). In a span of 39 years he wrote over 148 such texts, of which only about 45 are

available today. Ramaraya Kavi himself acknowledged the fact that all his works were not written by him but by Lord Hayagreeva himself. (Balasubramanian, 2008). He also asserted that 'for the sake of clarity and for attaining the knowledge of Brahman, he wrote many works such as *Advaitavijaya*, *Sariraka-Catussutri-Vicāra*, *Advaitāmruta*, *Vēdānta-Sangraha*, *Vēdānta tattvāmruta*, and others which are highly helpful for the inquisitive beginners of the Advaita school of philosophy.

Therefore, he refused to lend his works to outsiders for either publishing or for getting praised for its scholarly content. He strongly believed that he did not need to spend money for publishing these works as rishis like Valmiki and Vyasa did not get their works published during their lifetime. If Lord Hayagreeva caused these works to be written, he simply said to his relatives, it would be His divine duty to protect them. Thus, whatever works have remained today, they are considered as the blessed works of Lord Hayagreeva (Balasubramanian, 2008).

A unique feature of his works is that though he had manually written thousands of pages one does not find a single page with an overwriting or a word that was struck off. In a rare display of flawless and immaculate handwriting, the syllables of Sanskrit written in either Telugu or Devanagari Lipi appear to be carved out artistically in straight lines on the white pages of note books. There is not any apparent supporting library at his hut-home for the immense reference work one finds in his voluminous works on Advaita philosophy. All this bears a testimony to his *Brahmajnāna* due to Hayagreeva's blessing to him.

Marriage with Lakshmamma

Ramaraya Kavi got married to Adi Lakshmamma, the second daughter of Singaraju Venkata Ramaniah of Nellore. They had no children. Ramaraya Kavi too did not show any worry for not having a child. (Panduranga Sarma, 2010). He remained childless till he breathed his last and refused the suggestion to adopt any child from the families of his near and dear. He used to say that his works are his children. On her part, Adi Lakshmamma, though young and beautiful, never thought of disturbing her husband to satisfy her worldly desires. She was a perfect wife to him in terms of spirituality. She also used to speak and write in Sanskrit. She was an excellent singer and used to sing devotional *stōtras* and songs. She always talked pious things about her husband.

Refuting *Viśiṣṭādvaita*

Though Ramaraya Kavi's family embraced the *Vaiṣṇava* cult subscribing to the Ramanuja tradition of *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, he did not personally like the idea of getting branded with Lord Vishnu's marks such as *Śanku* and *Chakra*. However he was sporting *Oordhvapundraka* on his forehead. But, once Ramaraya Kavi had a confrontation with the Ramanuja Peetham head Sriman Tridandi Prativada Bhayankara Ranga Charya Mahaswami and his entourage when they visited his village Pamidipadu as part of their tour of the entire Telugu State (Balasubramanian, 2008). Rama Rao's family not only received them with all temple honours but also hosted the lunch and hospitality arrangements for the visiting head and members of the Ramanuja Peetham. They stayed for a few days comfortably at his residence. Mahaswami observed that Rama Rao was not complying with the discipline stipulated for disciples regarding paying obeisance to him as a Guru and Head of the Peetham.

One day he asked the villagers and disciples of Ramaraya Kavi to come forward to embrace *Viśiṣṭādvaita*. of Ramanuaja and get branded on their bodies with *Śanku* and *Chakra*. But, Ramaraya Kavi refused to get branded so. This not only angered the Mahaswami but also resulted in a heated argument between him and Ramaraya Kavi.

Rama Rao who had studied both *Sri Bhāsya* of Ramanujam and *Advaita Siddhānta* of Adi Shankara argued over such branding for Brahmins who perform all the Brahminical rituals as prescribed in *Śruti* (*Upanidshads*) and *Smriti (Brhamasutras* and *The Gīta)*. However, the Mahaswami argued that Ramaraya Kavi had no business to contest age-old practices, not taking into consideration the merits of the issues raised by Ramaraya Kavi. At last, angered by the defiance by Ramaraya Kavi, the Mahaswami and his entourage left their home and embarked on the return journey to their hometown. However, Ramaraya Kavi sent his relatives to accompany them with food and all supporting materials besides the money required for their journey. Then onwards Ramaraya Kavi removed the *Oordhvapundraka* from his forehead and, instead, kept a single line vertical 'Tilak' (Balasubramanian, 2008). Ever since, he turned into a complete *Smarta* Brahmin by adopting the *Advaita Vēdānta* of Adi Shankara as the guiding philosophy for his life and his family.

However some scholars like Sundararama Sastri (1952) and Balasubramanian (2008) dispute this interpretation of his biography. Sundararama Sastri argued that Ramaraya doubted the tenets of *Sri Bhashya* written by Ramanuja even before his learning came to a close under his teachers Purighatla Rama Sastri, Subrahmanya Sastri and Bhagavatula Hari Sastri. He once collected the work of Vidyaranya's *Panchadasi* on *Advaita* from

one of his students Narasimha Sastri, and read it simultaneously along with the text of Ramanuja's *Sri Bhashya*. On a persistent inquiry Ramaraya realized that *Sri Bhashya* of Ramanuja was developed on several faulty notions formed out of improper and poor understanding of *Bhramasutras*. He did not stop there. In his commentaries on *Advaita*, especially in *Sankarāsankara Bhasya Vimarsaha* and *Bhagavadgītābhāshyārkaprakāśika* he not only compared line by line both *Sri Bhasya* of Ramanuja and *Advaita siddhanta* of Adi Shankara, but also offered a critical rebuttal of *Sri Bhāṣya* of Ramanuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita* and Vēdānta Desika (Datta, 1980). Ramaraya Kavi further escalated his efforts of blasting *Viśiṣṭādvaita* in his subsequent philosophical treatise *Siddhānta Sindhuhu* (Datta, 1980) and *Vēdānta Sangrahaha*.

Balasubramanian (2008) has written that, '*Śārīraka-Catussutri-Vicāra* by Ramarayakavi, brings out the central ideas of the first four *sutras* of the *Brahma-sutra*, also known as *Śāriraka-sutra*, closely following Sankara's commentary on *Advaita*. It is a good introduction to the study of Sankara's entire commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras*. The question-answer method in the dialogue form which Ramarayakavi adopts in this work makes it interesting. The major part of this work is devoted to answering the question as to why an inquiry into Brahman, which means an inquiry into the inward Self of every one of us, is necessary. If it was the proper study of mankind, then no other problem is as important as this one, which engaged the attention of Ramarayakavi. (xvi)'

From his works one could clearly discern that Ramanuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita* is not based on any real-time spiritual experience of Brahman. Rather it was founded on not being able to realize one's self as laid down in *Advaita*. Ramaraya clearly established that there exists only *Advaita* and all other forms of conception of Brahman such as *Dvaita* and *Viśiṣṭādvaita* are due to ignorance.

To substantiate the interpretation tendered to the *Mahavakya 'Tat tvam Asi'*—by Advaitins, Ramaraya has drawn his arguments, cites Datta (1977), from *Smritis* (*Brahmasutras* and *The Gīta)* to support Śankara's conception. He emphatically declared that the revered sage Badarayana visualized with his divine sight that some persons would unhesitatingly and mischievously interpret the *Mahāvākya* and he himself gave the meaning of *Tat tvam Asi* in the *Skandapurāna*. He cited several verses from the 70th chapter of *Skandapurāna* to prove that the sage has upheld the use of *bhagalakṣaṇa* (partial abandoning of meaning) in interpreting the meaning of *Tat tvam Asi*. Ramaraya also added verses from *Sūtasamhita* to attest Sankara's interpretation. He also cited evidence from *AdhyātmarāmāyaGa* to buttress

Adi Sankara's interpretation of *Tat tvam Asi*. According to Datta, this is the unique contribution of Ramaraya to *Advaita siddhānta*.

While *Bhagavadgītābhāshyārkaprakāśika* and *Sankarabhāṣyavimarśah* written by Ramaraya Kavi met the criticism of Ramanuja and Vēdānta Desika against Adi Sankara's *Advaita siddhānta*, and *Siddhāntasindhuh*, another work of Ramaraya, not only nailed the tenets of *Viśiṣtādvaita*, but also offered a highly simplified version of *Siddhāntabindu* originally written by Madhusudana Sarasvati, the last great luminary belonging to the sixteenth century A.D. *Siddhantabindu* is Madusudana Sarasvati's elaborate and scholarly commentary on Sankara's *Daśaślōki* which contains the essence of Advaita. But, unfortunately very few living scholars of Sanskrit today can understand and explain this work. Ramaraya had resolved this complexity once for all. Ramaraya said once, that, due to the grace of Lord Hayagreeva, he could elaborate the *Siddhantabindu* in order to enable even a backward student to understand the original work.

A Poet Par-excellence in Sanskrit

Ramaraya Kavi is not just a philosopher, but a born poet in Sanskrit. According to Datta (1980), due to the grace of Lord Hayagreeva, he gained an unparallelled proficiency in writing tough concepts in simple Sanskrit terminology. Being highly proficient both in *kāvyas* and *śāstras*, he could be called, in the words of Rajasekhara, an *ubhayakavi*. Ramaraya was inspired by the works of Kalidasa, Sankara and Vēdānta Desika. His intense devotion to God, and his love for poetry, made him produce a few independent poetical works. He combined devotion and poetry in his works and thus made his works pleasant to read. Among several *kāvyas* written by him, only a few are available today: *Sri Krishna Lila TarangiGi, Samudramathana-Campu, Rukminipari Gaya Campu and Kandarpadarpavilāsa-Banaha*. Of the four kavayas, Datta has researched on *Rukminiparinaya Campu* and detailed how far it conformed to the story of Lord Krishna and Rukmini in the Sanskrit *Bhagavatam* and where it introduced innovations that come close to Bammera Potana's Telugu *Bhāgavatam*. This apart, Datta (1980) noticed that Ramaraya introduced several Telugu poetic meters and formats into his Sanskrit poetry. He also freely introduced the manners and customs of Telugu people during marriages in his poetry. Such versatility of Ramaraya Kavi greatly helped him write as many as 148 books that include a number of poetic works on different gods such as Lord Varaha, Lord Vishnu, and others.

An incident into which Ramaraya Kavi was dragged against his intentions was a dispute that had arisen in the *Śatāvādhanam*, a Telugu literary programme held at Narasaraopet, in which the reputed poet duo Tirupati Venkata Kavulu participated. In those days *Avadhāna*, extempore poetic renditions on given issues at an amazing pace, used to be one of the unique feats of Telugu poetry. Kopparapu Sodara Kavulu and Tirupati Venkata Kavulu used to offer rival poetic programmes touring the entire Telugu-speaking areas. Both became popular in a short time. They used to mutually appreciate and regard each other in terms of personal relationships but continued their scholarly rivalry in delivering the *Avadhāna prakriyas*. On the day of the Tirupati Venkata Kavulu programme at Narasaraopet, a complex rather a tough question was tendered to them as a *Dattapadi* to develop an extempore poem which was part of the *Avadhāna prakriya*. The tendered question was a line—*Paśya Paśyou Napaśyataha*.

One of the poet-duo had quickly responded saying that the 'given problem' (called *Dattapadi*) for developing a poem was unsustainable. They refused to accept it as a valid question in effect. Lanka Sundararama Sastri has written in the biography of his teacher (1952) that Ramaraya Kavi was forcibly taken to this *Śatāvadhānam* by his well-wishers and friends from Pamidipadu. After the arrival of Ramaraya Kavi, the question was again posed to Tirupati Venkata Kavulu in the presence of Ramarayakavi, but the poet duo repeatedly said that the question was unacceptable due to a defect that *Avadhāna* traditions do not accept. Ramaraya Kavi had simply got up and walked out of the programme without uttering a word.

Later Tirupati Venkata Kavulu had written an article in *Andhra Vāṇi*, a Telugu daily, on March 30, 1946, that there were two traditions namely *Kasika Vritti* and *Siddhānta Kaumudi* (revised). According to *Kasika Vritti*, the given *Pasya sabdam* is *asadhuvu* and therefore cannot be accepted as a *Dattapadi* for *Avadhana*. On the other hand according to the revised, latest version of *Siddhānta Kaumudi*, the given *Pasya sabdam* was a *sādhu śabdam* and hence a poem could be delivered extempore. Thus they said they did not lose in the programme held at Narasaraopet; nor did Ramaraya Kavi supporters win it. They tended to heckle Ramaraya Kavi's question as *Paśyam Puśyam*.

The issue had generated considerable heat among Telugu literary scholars who have got divided virtually into two groups, each supported by a number of the then stalwarts in Telugu. Ramaraya Kavi had, in response, written an article, *"Gunja Garvabhanjanam—Panchana Palayanam"*, in which he not only disclosed the fact that the tendered question or *Dattapadi* to Tirupati Venkata Kavulu was from the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa Maharshi but

also offered a lot of evidence opposing the arguments of Tirupati Venkata Kavulu. It was after this, that the heat on the issue cooled down. Then, all the scholars fully accepted Ramaraya Kavi's arguments and his flawless scholarship.

Ramaraya Kavi's Last Days

Ramaraya Kavi lived a short life. At the age of 39, he developed a small tumor on his back. He felt a little uneasy due to it. However he was not willing to go to a doctor for a treatment. During his 39 years of life, he had never gone out of Pamidipadu more than twice. He always engaged himself in writing masterpieces on spirituality and worship of Lord Vishnu or on Lord Hayagreeva. At last, following the unrelenting pressure from his family members he went to Madras (now Chennai) cancer hospital for treatment. Dr. Gopala Charyulu, who treated him, advised him complete rest for six months discontinuing all his engagement with writing work. (Panduranga Sarma, 2010). But, Ramaraya Kavi did not like the suggestion. He immediately refused and returned to his village saying that though his body had performed all worldly duties but he had to do a lot to pursue his spiritual goal. But, soon he realized that his last days had come. His wife offered pious services to him in the last days of his life. Finally on October 27, 1914, he breathed his last.

Uniqueness of Ramaraya Kavi's Literature

According to Professor Balasubramanian and Revathy, Sri Ramaraya Kavi's *Vēdānta -Sangraha* is one of the fundamental and important texts on *Advaita* philosophy. It describes the basic theories and concepts of *Vēdānta*. The interpretation and explanation of the text give us an insight into *Advaita*. It is also significant to note that Ramaraya Kavi had explained in detail the different technical terminologies of *Vēdānta* used by the philosophers of that period while establishing his own doctrines. They further added that Ramaraya Kavi belonged to the group of illustrious commentators on the basic texts and commentaries on *Advaita Vēdānta*.

Professor Datta (1977;1980), who received his doctoral degree for his work on Ramaraya Kavi has enlisted his seven fundamental contributions to the school of *Advaita Siddhanta* in particular and to the Sanskrit grammar and poetic traditions in general. He writes that though there were several other scholars earlier to Ramaraya Kavi who refuted Ramanujam's *Sri Bhashyam* and

defended Shankara's *Advaitam*, but, most of such works remained partially complete or only sufficient enough to defend, says Datta. Thus by a turn of events, he turned into a great champion of *Advaita* and a bitter critic of *Viśiṣṭādvaita*.

Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Saastri (2010; 2014), an eminent Sanskrit scholar and author of a number of Sanskrit works, translated and interpreted several of Ramaraya Kavi's works. In particular, Subrahmanya Saastri has translated into Telugu the works *Siddhanta Sindhuhu* and *Śankaraśankara Bhāṣya Vimarsam* of Ramaraya. He describes that Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi is a poet whose depth of knowledge appears to be equal to a repository of millions of books. His ability to quickly grasp any given literary issue, and offer new evidences and interpretations to the earlier texts, is beyond anybody's imagination, said Subrahmanya Saastri. Saastri has not only extensively studied the works of Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi but also has written commentaries on *Paramātma Sahasranāmāvali*, *Advaita Vijayamu*, and others of Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi.

Somayajulu (1983) has given a detailed appreciation of Ramaraya Kavi's works in his article published in a literary magazine *Samālōchana* published from Rajahmundry (Somayajulu Sarma, 1983). He classified Ramaraya Kavi's works into several categories: *Aṣtakas*, *Strotras*, *Dandakams*, and *Vēdānta* works, etc. Ramaraya Kavi has written nearly 60 *actakas*, three *stotras*, three *sahasranāmās*, two *dandakams*, one *gadya stotram*, 10 *kāvyas*, four commentaries, one grammar text on *Siddhānta Kaumudi* called *Śaradrātri*, two *dharma śastra* texts, 16 *Vēdānta* texts and 12 other scholarly works. Of these, only a few are available today. In his brief write-up published in *Samālōchana*, Somayajulu Sarma (1983) described the significance of a few of Ramaraya Kavi's works category-wise.

According to Ravi Mohana Rao, the work *Bhashyarca Prakasika* of Ramaraya Kavi is a classic text that not only offered scientific evidence and interpretation to Adi Sankara's *Bhasya* on *Bhagavad Gīta* but also unequivocally condemned the distortions that had flowed from *Viśiṣtādvaita* (Rao & Datta, 2003).

Mullapudi Viswanadha Sastri (2014) has described the unique features of *Hayagreeva Sahasranāmāvali* written by Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi. The unique feature of this work is that Ramaraya Kavi himself had written a commentary on this *Sahasranāmāvali*. In this master work, Ramaraya Kavi followed a unique pattern of praising Lord Hayagreeva. He had written all *nāmās* (names) with the starting Sanskrit alphabet 'Ha'. He has followed 'Ha' *gunintam* (various inflections of 'Ha') in the entire order of *Sahasranāmāvali*.

However, Viswanadha Sastri has observed some deviations to this order. But, he could easily gauge the reasons as to why Ramaraya Kavi deviated from the order he had followed in writing this *Sahasranāmāvali* (Viswanadha Sastri, 2014). Similarly, Ramaraya Kavi's *Vishnu Sahasranāmāvali* runs with alphabet 'Va' in the *gunintam* order of Sanskrit. Likewise, the appreciations and encomiums showered on Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavindrulu are innumerable.

Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavindrulu Trust

It was after his death that his family adopted a son from among his kith and kin. He was given the name Narayana Rao. He had children in his second wife Vijaya Lakshmi. His children Ramakoteswara Rao, Mohan Rao and Srinivasa Rao and his grandson Subrahmanya Sarma are alive today. They together, along with their family members, instituted Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavindrula Trust at Narasaraopet. The Trust has undertaken to publish a number of available works of Ramaraya Kavi. The Trust has also raised a memorial to Ramaraya Kavi by installing his statue at the site of the ruins of the small hut where this great poet, philosopher and scholar had lived in for 38 years. Apart from Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavindrulu Trust, Ravi Mohan Rao from Chirala, and Saadhana Grandha Mandali, Tenali, have also published some of his works, but the problems with all these publications have already been explained in the very opening pages of this article.

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